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ABSTRACT

Alienation is experienced by adolescents in varying degrees; however, little research has investigated alienation in relationship to Greek sorority/fraternity membership versus independent status among college students. To measure alienation among freshmen sorority members and freshmen independents in a small women's college, 60 women completed the Dean's Alienation Scale. Results showed that the largest percentages of women joined sororities for social activities and to make friends. Independent students said that they were not interested in sororities or preferred to be independent; some cited financial and time considerations as well. Scores on the Alienation Scale showed significant differences between sorority members and independents in terms of social isolation and total alienation: independents scored higher in both areas. No significant differences occurred for either powerlessness and normlessness. Further research is needed to understand how alienation might be mitigated through various types of group membership. (JAC)

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Alienation Among Sorority and Independent Freshmen at a Women's College

by Dorothy D. Prisco

Abstract

This study investigates the degree of alienation among freshmen sorority members and freshmen independents at a women's college. Alienation, in varying degrees, is often experienced by freshmen students; knowledge of how this may be mitigated through membership in groups is essential in establishing a positive beginning in college.

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Purpose

This study was undertaken to measure alienation among freshmen sorority members and freshmen independents in a small, women's liberal arts college in New Jersey.

Background

Freshmen students are traditionally in the period of late adolescence when they continue to experience varying degrees of isolation and loneliness. Why is this so? Burlingame (1970) stated that adults seem to "reward mediocrity, conformity, and superficiality, thus preventing the decisive articulation of identity" (p. 141); therefore, alienation is experienced. Paul Goodman, in Growing Up Absurd, explained this sense of alienation in adolescents because they don't feel a sense of security, "the sense of being needed for one's unique contribution" (Burlingame, p. 142). Keniston (1970) focuses much of his research on alienated students, contrasting them to student activists. The alienated are that "convinced/meaningful change of the social and political world is impossible...dropping out is the only real option"... they "prefer peripheral roles, avoid responsibilities" (p. 240). Others have suggested that alienation results from the negative attitudes students have toward authority (Bakal, Madaus, and Winder, 1968, 206).

Those adolescents who experience alienation to a lesser degree find comfort in the peer group. Late adolescents search for security in relationships; they want friends who

are "loyal and trustworthy" (Coleman, 1974, p. 92). Mueller (1961) states that these social relationships are "fundamental to the welfare of teenagers away from home" (p. 452). Konopka (1976) concludes that "there is one generalization one can make about adolescence. It is the age when one greatly needs one's contemporaries... the time when one becomes truly part of one's own generation...friends are the life-blood of adolescence" (p. 84).

Sorority membership for freshmen women away from home for the first time can serve to alleviate feelings of alienation. Sororities can offer freshmen women a sense of belonging, group support, and a systemized pattern of sharing (interests, values, behavioral patterns); sororities offer traditions that "inspire a feeling of solidarity" (Gerson, 1969, pp. 385-388).

Problem

Alienation is experienced by adolescents in varying degrees and has been written about extensively. Yet, alienation has not been explored in relationship to Greek membership versus independent status among college students. Previous researchers have contrasted sororities/fraternities and independents in reference to a number of areas. Miller (1973) studied characteristics that differentiated fraternity and independent men. Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, and Zettle (1978) documented the four-year impact of fraternity and sorority membership and independent status on attitudes and values. Lemire (1979) studied the affiliation needs of

sorority and fraternity members compared to independents. This study, focusing on a previously unexplored area, was designed to add to the research contrasting independents and members of Greek organizations.

Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was postulated: there is no significant difference in the degree of alienation between sorority members and independents.

Sample

The participants in this study were freshmen women enrolled in a women's college during the fall 1980. Dean's Alienation Scale was administered to sorority members and independents. A number of answer forms had to be eliminated because they were inproperly filled out. The final sample included 30 freshmen sorority members and 30 freshmen independents.

Instrument

Dean's Alienation Scale was designed by Dwight G. Dean (1961), who has done extensive research on the concept of alienation. The 24-item scale (see Appendix for keyed copy) consists of three subscales: powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation. This instrument was located in Miller (1977, pp. 379-380). The reliability of the Normlessness subscale, when corrected, was .73; the Social Isolation subscale had a "split-half" reliability of .84 when corrected for attenuation; the reliability of

the Powerlessness subscale, tested by the "split-half" technique, was .78 when corrected by the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula. The total Alienation Scale had a reliability of .78 when corrected (Dean, 1961, p. 756).

Dean (1961) has described in detail the formulation of the Alienation Scale. For the Powerlessness element, he has drawn partially on the works of Hegel, Marx, and Weber who have written about man's feeling of helplessness over his economic destiny (p. 754). The component of Normlessness is derived from Durkheim's concept of "anomie" with characteristic feelings of anxiety, pointlessness, and lack of direction (p. 754). Normlessness, Dean points out, has "two rather distinct subtypes": (1) loss of values and direction, insecurity, and hopelessness; (2) conflict of norms such as cooperative vs. competitive directives and the "alleged freedom of the individual vs. the factual limitations on his behavior" (p. 755). Social Isolation is also traced to Durkheim's "anomie" which included "a feeling of separation from the group or of isolation from group standards" (p. 755).

Statistical Analysis

For the sorority and independent groups, mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for the total Alienation Scale as well as for the three subscales. To determine if a significant difference existed between the two groups for the total Alienation Scale and for the subscales, a t-test was applied. The data was evaluated at the .05 level of significance.

Results

Some personal data was collected from the sample at the time the Dean's Alienation Scale was administered. Age data is given in Table 1. The largest percentage of women

Table 1
Age Distribution of Women in Sample

	Sorority N=30		Independent N=30	
	Number	%	Number	%
Age				
17	2	6.7	--	--
18	20	66.6	19	63.3
19	6	20.6	8	26.7
20	--	---	1	3.3
21	--	---	1	3.3
Age omitted	2	6.7	1	3.3

in each group is eighteen years old; nineteen-year-olds form the second largest age group for sorority members and independents.

The reasons given for joining sororities are in Table 2.

Table 2
Reasons for Joining a Sorority

Reasons	Number	%
To make friends	8	26.7
Social activities	15	50.0
Prestige	1	3.3
To meet men	3	10.0
No special reason	1	3.3
Other reasons	2	6.7

N=30

The largest percentages of women have joined sororities for the social activities and to make friends; this supports the findings in past research that has investigated the purpose and functions of the sorority and the fraternity. The "other reasons" given for joining a sorority were: (1) "to do some-

thing different" and (2) "it gives the feeling of a family away from home."

The reasons independents gave for not choosing to join a sorority are in Table 3. The largest percentages of women

Table 3
Reasons for Remaining Independent

Reasons	Number	%
Not interested	9	30.0
I dislike sororities	1	3.3
Prefer to be independent	10	33.3
Could not get into one, but was interested	1	3.3
No reasons indicated	1	3.3
Other reasons	8	26.7

N=30

either were "not interested" in sororities or "preferred to be independent." Over 25% of the independents, however, expressed their own reasons for not joining a sorority. These included having neither the financial requirements nor the time to get involved in a sorority, disliking the hazing process, and one independent who found sorority members "silly, not serious about the future."

Dean's Alienation Scale is made up of 24 items divided into subscales as follows: Powerlessness, 9 items; Normlessness, 6 items; Social Isolation, 9 items. Each item is scored from 0-4 points. The range of scores on each of the subscales has a low point of zero (the lowest levels of powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation) to 24 (the highest level of normlessness) and 36 (the highest levels of powerlessness and social isolation). Therefore, the scores on the total Alienation Scale can range from 0-96.

The range of scores for the two groups studied is in Table 4. Except for the Normlessness subscale, independents had scores higher than sorority members; in the Normlessness subscale, however, independents scored in a slightly higher range.

Table 4
Range of Scores for Total Alienation Scale and Subscales

	Sorority	Independent	Highest Levels
Powerlessness	5-26	11-29	36
Normlessness	4-20	6-20	24
Social Isolation	7-28	12-30	36
Total Alienation Scale	17-70	33-73	

The means, standard deviations, and t-values are given in Table 5. Based upon the findings, the null hypothesis (no significant difference in the alienation levels of sorority members and independents) was rejected. The significant differences between sorority members and independents was in the area of social isolation and for the total alienation level; no significant differences were found in the powerlessness and normlessness subscales.

Table 5
Means, Standard Deviations, and t-Values for Dean's Alienation Scale

	Sorority N=30		Independent N=30		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	t
Powerlessness Subscale	17.47	5.02	19.23	4.36	1.42
Normlessness Subscale	11.5	3.89	12.17	3.30	.707
Social Isolation Subscale	17.43	5.89	20.57	4.06	2.36*
Total Alienation Scale	46.4	6.68	51.97	9.14	2.65*

*$p < .05$

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research (Miller, 1973; Longino and Kart, 1973; Wilder et al., 1978) that has found differences between independents and members of Greek societies. This study, focusing on alienation, was intended to expand the research that has emphasized attitudes and values. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to understand how alienation, with all its negative connotations, might be mitigated through various types of group membership.

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